

My memories of Saint Josemaria (II)

José Luis Soria was a doctor who first met St. Josemaria in 1953. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1956 and from then until St. Josemaria's death in 1975 he lived and worked with him in Rome. Fr. Soria now exercises his priestly ministry in Vancouver.

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When I met the now Saint Josemaria in the fall of 1953, what had most attracted my attention was that the

chance to meet the founder of Opus Dei.

I knew, too, that the founders of most institutions in the Church had been beatified or canonized.

Usually when the Lord places on the shoulders of a man or a woman the task of opening a new way of following Christ, He chooses the appropriate instrument.

Whatever the difficulties such a foundation will meet (and the founding of Opus Dei implied incredible difficulties of all kinds) the founder is also given the necessary graces to be faithful to the mission received.

I knew very little more about the then Monsignor Escriva and, even regarding his physical appearance, my knowledge was extremely limited. Prior to that day in 1953 I remembered having seen only one

picture of him, taken probably 13 or 14 years earlier.

Of course, never before in my life had I been acquainted with a personality such as Saint Josemaria, but I was not overwhelmed. In the years to come I was going to have the opportunity of hearing the question he addressed sometimes to young members of Opus Dei when they arrived in Rome: “How did you imagine the Father (that is, he himself, since we all called him “Father”)? As a stern, solemn and serious character?”

In fact he was for us (young professionals or university students at the time) the personification of a loving, cheerful, amusing and strong father. It was so easy to love him!

The get-togethers we had with him were sheer pleasure: good humour, sometimes to the point of explosive laughter, and at the same time

incredible occasions of learning about God, the characteristics of the spirit of Opus Dei, the history of the Church, funny or interesting anecdotes based on art and literature, news about the apostolic activities of Opus Dei in other countries, etc.

Close to two hundred people were crammed into the headquarters of Opus Dei, which were then under construction, some parts already finished in a traditional Roman style, and some other parts of the pre-existing buildings awaiting demolition.

I remember Saint Josemaria teasing one young man from the United States about one recently finished section, seemingly of a venerable age due to the skills of Roman painters and construction workers.

The patina fooled the person who was questioned, who declared,

convinced that that part should not survive the demolition: that it was “too old”!

His immense, enormous faith and—in consequence—his unity of life, without independent compartments separating prayer and action, was another trait of his personality, immediately evident after meeting him. Saint Josemaria had suffered and would continue to suffer because some people (many of whom should have known better) interpreted his faith as fanaticism or madness.

But for me, as for many other people, his unity of life was an outstanding characteristic.

This article is part of a series of articles by Fr. Soria. The other articles are available below:

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